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Jo Ellen Jacobs's essay, "Harriet Taylor Mill's Collaboration with John Stuart Mill:"

Response Paper by Lindsay Weinberg

In her article, "Harriet Taylor Mill's Collaboration with John Stuart Mill," Jo Ellen Jacobs argues that Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill shared a collaborative philosophical relationship. Her strongest argument is her simplest. Jacobs begins with the premise: "Without substantial evidence to the contrary, it seems reasonable to believe that work is collaborative if the participants say it is so" (157). In support of this premise, Jacobs gives many examples of John Stuart Mill's clear statements that his philosophical works were the product of collaboration with Harriet Taylor, as well as statements from Taylor about her work with Mill. Jacobs also states that she has not found any evidence that proves they did not work together. Since the participants have said that they worked collaboratively and nothing exists to prove otherwise, Jacobs concludes that Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill shared a collaborative philosophical relationship.

I found Jacobss' article wholeheartedly convincing. Her argument is sound and easily understandable. The weakest part of her argument is her lack of evidence contrary to the Mills's collaboration. She has not found any; this does not mean there is none. There is a possibility of the existence of information which would render her argument unsound. On the other hand, based on the research I've done on Harriet Taylor Mill, Jo Ellen Jacobs seems to be the most knowledgeable expert on Taylor's life and works today. If she has not

found any provable contrary evidence, I am inclined to believe that none has been discovered by anyone thus far, so at this point in time that premise of her argument is true.

Regarding the second premise, the participants have definitely said that they were collaborators. Jacobs not only shows this, but goes further to give reasons that their statements were true. She explains that many of Harriet's letters were destroyed, so that most of the verification will be based on Mill's claims. Yet Jacobs still manages to give examples of Harriet's claims to collaborating with Mill by reference to letters Taylor wrote at that time to her husband, John Taylor, about how busy she was working on the book with Mill. Mill's dedications and introductions after Harriet's death clearly state that their works were a combined effort. However, it is questionable whether a great deal of weight can be placed on these comments, since they were written after Taylor's death, when Mill was grieving the loss of the woman he loved deeply. In fact, some critics have claimed that because of Mill's emotional state at the time, these statements cannot count as evidence of Taylor's and Mill's collaboration. However, letters Mill sent to Taylor while he was working on his philosophical writings, particularly *The Politics of Political Economy* and *On Liberty*, indicate that Mill not only valued Taylor's input and suggestions; he felt the need to verbally discuss ideas to settle disagreements and figure out concepts which he did not "in reality know how to write" (159). These letters are not full of the flowery praise that might be said to characterize Mill's later dedications to Taylor. They were simple and to the point; they were not

intended to impress the critics. As such, I think that they constitute reliable evidence of the Taylor-Mill collaboration.

Other scholars have wondered why, if they truly collaborated, neither of them said so at the time of publication of Mill's works. Jacobs notes that the complicated relationship triangle with Taylor, as well as negative attitudes towards women's acceptance in academia, is one reason why Harriet's name was left out of the authorship claims. The question then arises, "Why didn't Taylor use a pen name, as was common for women during this period? It seems that Taylor would be more easily accepted if, instead of claiming she worked in collaboration with Mill, she simply used a pen name in her collaborative work with Mill. The issue of pen names raises the question whether the largest barrier for women philosophers to overcome is not the idea of their collaborative contributions to work single-authored by male philosophers. Rather, the question is whether male-biased views about the nature of philosophy and who is capable of doing philosophy have prevented recognition of key historical women writers as philosophers in their own right, whether or not they collaborated with male philosophers. This, of course, is precisely the question that the "recovery project" in philosophy—the project of reclaiming the perspectives and writings of women philosophers in the history of philosophy—is all about.